

Fact Sheet



Nichols, Iowa Ground Water Site

Nichols, Iowa

December 2001

Introduction

The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 has been further investigating soil and ground water contamination at the Nichols, Iowa Ground Water Site. The two sources of nitrate, pesticide, and herbicide contamination are the Nichols Agriservice facility and the former Cropmate facility. The migration of contamination from these facilities have affected the drinking water supply in Nichols. EPA is working with the facilities about continuing alternate water supplies or filters to affected residents of Nichols.

Current Activities

EPA and Nichols Agriservice have signed an administrative order on consent to abate the hazard posed by the migration of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers from the Nichols Agriservice facility. The order directs Nichols Agriservice to:

- Determine the source of contamination at its facility,
- Remove contaminated soils if necessary, and
- Conduct ground water monitoring activities.

EPA is also negotiating a similar administrative order on consent with the Cropmate Company to address contamination at the former Cropmate facility. A separate fact sheet will be distributed when EPA and the Cropmate Company have signed the order. In addition, EPA is working with the companies that are providing bottled water or filters to ensure that the affected residents of Nichols continue to have a safe drinking water supply.

The work performed by Nichols Agriservice will be conducted under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) Section 7003. The RCRA, an amendment to the Solid Waste Disposal Act, was established in 1976 to address how to safely dispose of hazardous and nonhazardous municipal and industrial waste generated nationwide and to ensure prevention of future releases. Later, the RCRA was expanded to address releases of hazardous waste or hazardous constituents through cleanup of wastes released from RCRA hazardous waste facilities. The initial investigations at this site were conducted under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, known as CERCLA or Superfund. Congress established the Superfund Program in 1980 in response to

growing concerns about health and environmental risks posed by hazardous waste sites.

The public has an opportunity to comment on the cleanup order. The public comment period will begin December 20, 2001 and will end on January 19, 2002. A copy of the cleanup order and other documents are located in the Administrative Record at the Nichols City Hall and at the EPA office in Kansas City. The city hall is located at 321 Main Street. For residents to view the cleanup order and other documents, please contact Phil Mills, Mayor Pro Tem, at (319) 723-4223. Please send all comments to EPA's project manager. His name and address are in the box to your right.

Please send written comments to:

**Robert Stewart, Project Manager
EPA Region 7
901 N. Fifth Street
Kansas City, Kansas 66101
Toll-Free: 1(800)223-0425 or
directly at (913) 551-7654
Email: stewart.robert@epa.gov**

EPA will consider all comments received during the public comment period and may change or withdraw its consent to the cleanup order if comments received have facts or considerations which indicate that the cleanup order is inappropriate, improper, or inadequate. EPA's response to any comments received will be placed in the Administrative Record. Commenters may request an opportunity for a public meeting in Nichols. Requests for a public meeting may be sent to the name and address in the box.

Previous Site Investigations

In April 2000, EPA conducted an inspection, known as an Expanded Site Inspection, to determine the areal and vertical extent of contaminated soil and ground water at the facilities. Also as part of the site inspection, EPA determined background concentrations of herbicides, pesticides and nitrate. The results of the inspection indicated:

- A number of pesticides have been released to the soil at the Nichols Agriservice facility and former Cropmate facility at concentrations that exceed background.
- Soil contamination is due to past and/or current activities at the Nichols Agriservice facility and the former Cropmate facility.
- Ground water contamination in the private wells north of Nichols Avenue is due to operations at the Nichols Agriservice facility.
- Ground water contamination in the private wells south of Nichols Avenue is due to the operations at the former Cropmate facility.

Background

In January 1997, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) sampled three private wells in Nichols in response to a complaint about the ground water. Nitrates and herbicides, such as alachlor,

atrazine and metolachlor, were discovered in the water. Additional sampling of private wells was conducted later in 1997 by IDNR and the Muscatine County Health Department and by Monsanto. The results of the sampling showed two areas of ground water contaminated with nitrates. Within these two areas were smaller areas of ground water contaminated with the herbicides alachlor and atrazine. Some contaminants were found at levels above public drinking water standards, also known as maximum containment levels (MCLs). Based on the samples taken, two possible sources of the contamination were identified, the former Cropmate and Nichols Agriservice facilities.

In April 1999, EPA sampled soil, sediment, and ground water at seven areas to determine if the areas could be sources of the contamination. The sample data eliminated several potential source areas and identified the former Cropmate facility and Nichols Agriservice as likely source areas. Ground water samples were also taken from private homes to ensure that citizens were not drinking contaminated water.

The 7.5-acre former Cropmate facility is on the western edge of Nichols. Past operations included formulation and storage of agricultural fertilizers and the storage and sale of herbicides. All buildings at the site were razed in 1987 after the facility ceased operation. The site is currently covered with vegetation.

Nichols Agriservice, on the northwest side of Nichols, is a full-service agriservice facility storing fertilizer, anhydrous ammonia, herbicides and other agricultural farm chemicals. A grain elevator and other office and storage buildings are located on the property.

United Agri Products, Inc., the parent corporation of the Cropmate Company, is supplying bottled water to homes where the ground water is contaminated with nitrates above the MCL. Monsanto, the maker of alachlor, and Novartis, the maker of atrazine, are supplying filters that remove herbicides in water to certain homes. Since 1997, Monsanto has annually sampled tap water in homes in the area of herbicide-contaminated ground water to ensure all homes that need filters are receiving them and the installed filters are working properly.

For More Information

If you have questions about this fact sheet or need additional information, please contact:

Shawntell Crossgrow, Community Involvement Coordinator
EPA Region 7
901 N. Fifth Street
Kansas City, Kansas 66101
Toll-free 1-800-223-0425 or
directly at (913) 551-7676